

THE SAYINGS OF KABIR

INTRODUCTION

KABIR is one of those illustrious and immortal philosopher-poets of the world who, having penetrated, in the words of Carlyle, the veil of the seeming things, brought out a distinct message of hope, joy and blessing for suffering humanity, and strove strenuously for its spiritual, moral and social upliftment. The lives of such benefactors of our race are mostly shrouded in mystery, for they always merge their own individualities into the larger public life; and it is only when they have passed away from this world, that people, awake to the realisation of their worth, can

understand the import of their message, can recognise the significance of their mission.

Kabir's early life is wrapped up in mystery. What has been discovered in the way of his biographical details is very little. Beyond the facts that he was a weaver, born of poverty-stricken parents, and lived at Kashi (Benares) during the reign of Sikander Lodhi, that he was the disciple of the great religious reformer, Ramanand, and that he was himself the Guru of a number of distinguished pupils, we know positively nothing about him. The probable date of his death is A.D. 1519 as mentioned in *Kabir Ka Santi*. Stories have, however, come down to us regarding his marvellous spiritual powers and his performance of a number of miracles, but they are to be taken for what they are worth.

Kabir has been alleged to have founded a great religious sect, popularly called "Kabir panth," which has a large number of followers all over upper India, but judging from the

unsectarian character of his teaching, it is almost certain that this sect came into being after his death. He was himself above all sects, cults and creeds, and the story that at his death Hindus and Muhammadans quarrelled over his corpse, each claiming him as a follower of his own religion, lends support to this view. His catholicity of view, his attitude of religious toleration, his love for universal truth and his loftiness of character are reasons enough for his being a *persona grata* with all people—Hindus and Muhammadans, men and women, householders and ascetics, the rich and the poor. He believed in the eternity and unity of the soul, which is beyond all man-made limitations and to which all religions are only so many outward vestments.

As a poet, Kabir has few equals in his line. His language is eminently simple, his ideas are always clearly, gracefully, yet boldly expressed, his poetic composition is most natural and unlaboured, and his skill in compressing a world

of sense within the short compass of a simple couplet is unexcelled—even unrivalled. There is no simulation, no deception, no beating about the bush, in his expressions. They emerge straight from his heart, hall-marked by the stamp of the sincerity of his soul. He never feared truth, however unpleasant its consequences. He never yielded to falsehood, however glittering and fascinating its appearances.

Kabir was a voluminous writer. No less than seventy-two works in poetry have been credited to his authorship. They all proclaim a holy message and never pander to low, worldly tastes. They aim at uplifting man's mind to the higher planes of truth, opening to his gaze the unlimited vistas of spiritual vision and bringing for him fresh and fragrant buds from the garden of eternal divine bliss.

Although it is difficult to differentiate the merits of Kabir's various works with a view to appraising their relative worth, yet it would

not be going on unsafe ground to say that his “Sakhees”—moral sayings—are the best of all his poetic productions. These sayings stand unmatched, unrivalled and unparalleled in the whole range of human literature. Their characteristic features are directness of speech, depth of sincere feeling, simplicity and beauty of style, comprehensiveness of meaning and appropriateness of similes, metaphors and other figures used. They are so popular that there is hardly a man in upper India who does not know some of them by heart. An attempt has been made in these pages to present a well-selected number of these sayings in English garb to the English-knowing public.

THE SAYINGS OF KABIR

1

The Lord and the teacher are both one—the difference consists in mere form. He who effaces the lower self, reaches the Lord.

2

A disciple, whose preceptor is (spiritually) blind, is a totally deluded being. A blind man leadeth a blind man to destruction.

3

Sow thou a rose to him that soweth thee a thorn. To thee there is always a rose; to him there is a thorn for ever more.

4

Do not hurt the weak; their sighs are powerful. Lo! A breath coming out of a dead skin (bellows) burneth iron to ashes.

5

Kabir! it is better to be deceived than to deceive others. To be deceived is to become wise and happy. To deceive others is to inflict misery.

6

Coming into this world, give up all crookedness. Hasten to take what you can; the mart is closing.

7

The merit of being born consists in giving alms. Thou knowest not whether thou would again get this human body. The present body is the only body you are sure of.

8

Love God and give alms to the poor.
This is what Kabir proclaimeth to the
world.

9

Behold ! Riches decrease not by alms-giving
nor does a river lose by giving water to the
thirsty.

10

Kabir ! Go not where family prestige alone
is valued ; they know not the worth of a man
but only his father's name.

11

Go where there is union of hearts and
purposes, of sentiments and actions. That is
how the virtuous love each other.

12

Give up the crookedness of the heart, and speak such words as soothe and console others and thyself alike.

13

An insulting word emerges single from the mouth but it multiplies by being returned. Don't therefore return it; it will remain single as it is.

14

Your mind is what your food is; your voice is what your drinking stuff is.

15

To beg is to die; do not, therefore, beg. It is better to die than to beg. This is what great teachers say.

10 THE SAYINGS OF KABIR

16

Do not hear sensuous stories. They incite lust and lead to the forgetfulness of the Lord's name. This is the deliberate opinion of Kabir.

17

All seek the Lord in a moment of need—none in a moment of joy. He that seeketh Him in a moment of joy, never comes to grief.

18

Blessed is the breath that passeth in the remembrance of the Lord. Consider all other breaths passed in worldly efforts as lost.

19

Have no faith in this perishable body. Remember Lord by all your breaths ; that is the only way to salvation.

20

For my own-self I would prefer dying to begging, but for the sake of others I would gladly beg and be not ashamed.

21

A tree, a pool, a cloud and a good man exist only for the good of others.

22

The sensuous, the covetous and the angry cannot love God. Only the brave that give up caste, creed and colour, can love Him.

23

The body that is not animated by the sentiment of love is like a cemetery. It is just like the bellows of the blacksmith that breathe without life.

24

When love arises in a person, it cannot be concealed. Even if the man were not to speak of it by his lips, his eyes will pathetically betray it.

25

Let an ascetic practise austerities ever so hard, but he would not reach the Lord if he has no love. The Lord's realm is verily difficult to reach.

26

A day will come when separation from everything is inevitable. Neither a king, nor a prince, neither a rich man nor a beggar nor even a saint is exempt from it.

27

Behold! Those who build lofty palaces crowned with golden turrets leave them empty and go to the cemetery.

28

Man is but a toy made up of five elements. Is it not a wonder that for so short a time (for the brief span of life that is all that is allotted to him), he is seen building his residential quarters from place to place ?

29

“ Why dost thou trample upon me,” crieth the earth to the potter ; “ a day will come when I shall trample upon thee.”

30

The body is passing away ; gather what you can. Those who had hoards of riches have gone empty-handed.

31

The body is passing away ; make use of it, if you can. Devote it either to the service of the holy men or to the worship of the Lord.

32

Egotism is a great peril, run away from it if you can. How long, my Lord, can fire be kept concealed under the coatings of cotton?

33

The body is an inn and the mind a bird that has willingly taken a lodging in it? It is but a truism that none is none's relative.

34

He who has come, will depart whether he is a Raja or a beggar. The one departs while sitting on a throne—the other, while struggling in chains.

35

Think not, O fool! that all this is thine! Even the vital airs that enchain thee to thy body, do not prove to be thine.

36

Thy repentance now, having done an evil act, is of no avail. Canst thou expect mango fruits, having planted a babul tree ?

37

It is the mind that makes a man strong, weak or sorrowful. As is the mind, so is the action.

38

It is the mind that makes a man liberal or greedy, a king or a beggar. If the mind devotes itself to God, it is certain to reach Him.

39

The mind is like a mad elephant roaming in the deep forest of this body. The disciplined ones control it by the piercing hook of wisdom.

40

It is the mind that makes success or failure. It is the mind that leadeth to the Lord.

41

It is the mind that leads a man to a forest or back from the forest to the town. Kabir asks what is to be done; the mind does not remain unperturbed and staid.

42

The waves of the mind are as sweeping as those of the ocean. If the mind were to become calm and stationary, gems would grow easily in its depths.

43

If you love me, do not hope for anything. Become just like me (stripped of all external associations). You have already everything with you.

44

That which ought to be gathered, is the love of God ; that which ought to be given, is food, etc., in charity. If you want to cross (the sea of the world), have recourse to humility. If you want to sink (in it), fall a victim to pride.

45

Another's wife is like a sharp knife ; do not bring her into your contact. Even the ten-headed Ravan lost all his heads owing to this cause.

46

Another's wife is like a sharp thorn that has pierced into the flesh and causes perpetual suffering without leaving the skin.

47

Love (to God) cannot be practised by the sensuous, the covetous and those addicted to anger. It can be practised only by the brave that give up all distinctions of caste, creed and colour.

48

A chaste man is superior to all. He is a storehouse of all the gems of prosperity. All the riches of the three worlds abide in chastity.

49

The number of those who practise holy contemplation, mental repetition of holy names, austerities, sense-control, even of those who are learned, benevolent and brave, is legion, but a chaste man is rare.

50

The unfathomable source of happiness is chastity. None who does not know Sabd (divine-sound) is a Sadhu ; none who has no money, is a rich man.

51

When you beg for something, you lose all the three things—dignity, respect and shame.

52

All the varieties of riches, such as cows, elephants, horses, jewels, minerals, etc., are nothing—are just like dust, before contentment.

53

The great should exercise forgiveness, even though the little indulge in mischief. Lord Vishnu did not suffer in reputation when Bhrigu dealt him a kick.

54

Virtue abides where there is compassion ; vice where there is greed ; death where there is wrath, and Lord himself, where there is forgiveness.

55

So long as the faculty of discrimination is not acquired, the object aimed at cannot be gained, nor can the ocean of the world be crossed. Kabir says all true teachers say so.

56

Why dost thou feel uneasy unnecessarily and curse in vain. All that Rama has ordained, will come out by and by.

57

All that comes peacefully is sweet. All that comes by quarrelling, is as bitter as the leaves of the Nim tree.

58

There's no austerity higher than truth ; no sin baser than falsehood. The Lord abideth in the heart where there is truth.

59

If you are a true shop-keeper, arrange thy shop aright. Sweep it thoroughly inside and throw away the dirt.

60

If God were to be reached by the shaving of the head, all would do it. A sheep though repeatedly shaved (fleeced), does not enter heaven.

61

The company of a good man relieves the distress of others. The company of a wicked man is full of perpetual troubles.

62

Coming in contact with a good man, though for half an hour, or a quarter of an hour or even half of that interval removes multitudes of sins.

63

Although snakes keep closely clinging to a Sandal-tree, they do not become harmless, as they are full of poison through and through.

64

The mind is like a bird that flies wherever it likes. As is your company, so is your reward.

65

Every forest does not contain a Sandal tree ; every army does not contain a real soldier ; every sea does not contain pearls ; even so a Sadhu is not found everywhere in the world.

66

A Sadhu comes in contact with all but he does not harm any one. He is unswerving in his beliefs. That is the way of a Sadhu.

67

The Lord abideth in all bodies. There is nothing that has not Him. Blessed indeed is the body in which He manifests Himself.

68

God is like the fire that is immanent in all beings. The flint of the mind does not reach it ; hence it is all smoke.

69

A Sadhu cares for your good feeling—not for your riches. He who wanders caring about riches, is not a Sadhu.

70

There is no limit to space ; there is no measurement of the earth ; there is no price of the philosopher's stone (it is priceless) ; even so there is no caste of a Sadhu.

71

Let a man perform thousands of pilgrimages and visit thousands of holy places, he will gain nothing if he does not serve holy men.

72

I am neither a Hindu nor a Mussalman.
I am a toy of five elements with the invisible
light playing within.

73

Lord, give me only so much as suffices
for my family. Let it be sufficient for my
hunger and for offering hospitality to a Sadhu.

74

The Lord has provided food-flour, salt and
water. He giveth it without fail, who is he
that can deprive me of it ?

75

Why should one in whose heart abideth
the Lord, be uneasy? A single wave from
the ocean (of His mercy) will sweep away
all suffering and poverty.

76

Have patience, O mind. Everything comes out in time. The gardener daily waters the plant, but it bears fruit only in season.

77

It is the Lord's to do all, not man's to do anything. He might turn a mustard seed into a mountain and a mountain into a seed.

78

O Lord, it is thou that doth all—not I who do anything. If Thou sayest that I have done anything, might not I answer that Thou wert in me?

79

Nothing happens that is proposed. That which happens is the unexpected. If what is proposed turns out, think that the doer is some one else.

80

If I turn the whole earth into paper, all the trees into pens and the seven seas into inkpots, even then the greatness of the Lord cannot be fully described.

81

None can escape the penalty of being born, in the whole universe—the three worlds, the nine continents and the seven seas.

82

Every man must suffer for his birth. The wise man suffers in his wisdom ; the fool in his sorrow.

83

There is no greater evil than a bad word ; it burneth everything away to ashes. A kind word is, on the other hand, like rain that falls in nectar-like torrents.

84

A word is priceless, if one knows how to use it. Let every word be weighed in the scales of the heart before it is given out.

85

There is nothing like a good word if one knows how to speak it. A diamond can be weighed and priced but not a good word.

86

The name of the Lord seems bitter and money sweet. Both are lost while distracted by doubts, neither Ram nor money is gained.

87

A wise word, coming from whomsoever it be, should be well-weighed. Let not prejudice vitiate it. Such is Kabir's advice.

88

The good days have gone by and the love of the Lord could not be cultivated. It is futile to repent now. The birds have eaten away the crop.

89

Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day, nor till the evening what you can do this very moment ; for you know not when death may overtake you, upsetting all your plans.

90

When you are not sure of even a fraction of a second, how can you wait till to-morrow ? Death will attack you as suddenly as a hawk attacks a partridge.

91

‘ They that were blooming have been plucked off,’ cried the flowers, at the sight of a gardener, ‘ we shall also meet our fate to-morrow.’

92

The tree said to the leaves, 'Do you hear the news, the custom in this place is that one comes and another departs' (old order changeth yielding place to new).

93

Seeing the moving stones of a grinding mill, Kabir shed a tear. None can escape unhurt, having come between these two stones. (The two stones are the earth and the sky.)

94

None can harm him whom the Lord protecteth. Not a hair of his head could be hurt, if the whole world were arrayed against him.

95

If one were to love the Lord just as much as he loves his family, none of his acts would go wrong.

96

Affections are of many kinds in the world, but the best of them is one relating to God and his devotees.

97

He alone is the hero who has all the five senses at his command. He who has no such control, never approaches the Lord.

98

A true soldier never leaves the field ; he fights to the last amidst the contending forces. Neither the hope of living nor the fear of death distracts his mind.

99

There is none that can equal a Sadhu, a sati or a true soldier. They place their feet on a precipitous way, from which even a slight deviation is a perilous fall.

100

A true soldier heeds not the loss of his head, a donor, of his riches and a devoted wife, of her body ; for does she not live all absorbed in her lord ?

101

It is easy to bear the heat of fire, easy to bear the edge of a sword but extremely hard to keep up undiminishing love.

102

A Sati would not grind corn ; she that would, is a widow ; just so, a Sadhu does not beg ; he who begs is an impostor.

103

God is like fire immanent in all bodies. The flint of the mind does not reach it ; hence it is liable to be extinguished.

104

The world is enmeshed in bondage, but the Sadhu is free. He is armed with the sword of wisdom with which he cuts asunder the bonds (of others).

105

Those who eat the flesh of fishes and are addicted to wine, will go, with their parents, to hell.

106

He who eats flesh, drinks wine, indulges in prostitutes, takes pleasure in gambling and commits theft, is utterly lost.

107

All flesh is one, whether it is the flesh of a deer, a cock or a cow. Those who eat it knowingly go to hell.

108

The goat that feeds upon leaves is cursed with a stiff skin. What fate will befall a man who eateth the goat!

109

The fool does not know that suffering is the same to all. If it is not so, why does he not go to heaven by having his own throat cut off (in sacrifice).

110

Those who know the suffering of others are saints; those who do not know it, are butchers only.

111

I tell you all that is in my mind. He whose throat you cut (in sacrifice), will verily cut yours.

112

The death-messengers of Kaliyuga (Iron Age) are bhang, tobacco and opium. Men are under their sway, forgetful of the Lord and His contemplation.

113

Bhang devours up all strength and understanding, opium is like the serpent's fangs. Both the intoxicants are pernicious. Let the wise hear this.

114

Let the wise mind the evil of wine-drinking. It turneth a man into a beast at His own expense.

115

When a man gives up the intoxication of body, mind, riches and learning, then only he hears the divine sound.

116

A diamond exposed for sale in a mart where there is no true appraiser, is sold for a shell.

117

The name of the Lord is a diamond found only in the heart. The Lord exists invisible inside and outside.

118

When there is a true tester, one's merits command a price of lakhs. When there is no such tester, they are sold for a shell.

119

A diamond ought not to be displayed for sale in a sham market. Pack it carefully and go your way.

120

A dog is better than a slanderer, for he quarrels knowingly. An angry man is worse than a dog, for he draws curses even on his teacher.

121

A man exults in the weaknesses of others. He does not see his own, which are infinite.

122

Do not despise a straw that lies at your foot. It may fly into your eye and cause a good deal of pain.

123

The man who talks infinitely of wisdom but does not feel compassion (toward others) will not go to heaven, though he may repeatedly be hearing these couplets.

124

Be compassionate at heart. Why do you become cruel? All beings from an elephant to an ant are Lord's creatures.

125

Whom should I love and whom hate? All alike are God's creatures, the ant as well as the elephant.

126

The world abounds in religious charlatans. There are few who are wise and thoughtful. Millions of such charlatans may be given up for one wise man.

127

The tongue enjoys all tastes—sweet, pungent and aciduous. If all the other four senses which are like bitches, thus conspire together, there is none left to keep the guard.

128

Content yourself with your own poor and rough food and drink cold water. Don't let your mind covet the rich food of others.

129

Abstain from gambling, theft, tale-telling, usury and indulging in another's wife if you want to see the Lord.

130

Just as there is an apple in the eye, so is the Lord within the body. The fool does not know this and goes out in His search.

131

The name of the Lord is filling the three worlds. It is near to one who knows it ; far to him who does not know it.

132

The Intelligent one is within the body; the external search for it, is fruitless. It is the veil of delusion that obstructs its vision.

133

The sea has flung ashore a wave scattering pearls. The gull does not know their value; the swan cheerfully picks and eats them.

134

What boldness have I to seek Thy grace, O Lord. I am ashamed of myself. I have sinned in Thy very presence. How canst thou love me ?

135

Forsake me not, O Lord, though the whole world be arrayed against me. To Thee there are many like me; to me Thou art the only protector.

136

I have been a life-long sinner full of defects from head to foot. Thou art merciful and reliever of suffering. Have mercy and look after me.

137

The world is an immeasurable ocean, deep, inaccessible and fathomless. O Lord ! Thou art full of mercy, show Thy grace so that I may fathom it.

138

A dumb man having tasted sugar, cannot tell its taste. Even so the experience of self-realisation cannot be described.

139

Just as a dumb man understands a dumb-man's signs, even so the joy of the self-realiser is understood only by the initiated one.

140

When Self-realisation comes, all pleasure and pain disappear. The Self-realiser becomes like a painted lamp unperturbed by all external commotions.

141

It is not what one may write about ; it is what one may perceive. When the bridegroom and the bride become united, the wedding procession loses all charm.

142

A learned man goes far entangling himself in the labyrinths of learned discussion. The Lord's image is close by him. Pity ! he is busy in an external search, while the Matchless Glory shines within him.

143

Just as Sugar toys are made of Sugar and Sugar exists in all of them, even so the whole universe exists in Brahm (God) and Brahm in it.

144

The Sugar and the Sugar toys are not two things ; they are both one. Similarly when real knowledge dawns, the manifold universe appears one.

145

You call sugar and sugar toys two things. They are both one, not two. It is only by name and form that the elephant, the horse and other creatures appear separate.

146

Kabir says that all iron is one. It is the manufacturing process that differentiates its qualities. The mail-coat and the sword are made of the same metal.

147

Fire is one though it appears different in different lamps, torches, etc. Similarly the world being one in Brahm appears manifold.

148

Just as there is no difference between an earthen pot and the earth, between the foams and the water, the ear rings and the gold ; even so the world is not different from the Brahm.

149

Just as the tree is in the seed and the seed in the tree ; even so is the world in the Brahm.

150

The individual soul and Brahm are not separate. They are identical and one just as the earthen pot and the earth, the ear ring and the gold, and the watery-foams and the wave, are one.

151

In the house of the Lord, there is no want. The servant that neglects his duty, findeth there none.

152

Mine is none ; Thine is all. Why should
I demur giving back what is Thine own ?

153

Many there are that pass away their lives
in learning, but few are there that become
wise. He that learneth a word of divine love,
becomes a sage.

154

When I went out to see evil in others,
I found nought. When I searched for it
within my own self, I realised that there is
no greater sinner than myself.

155

When desire disappears, anxiety is no
more. They who do not want anything are
the richest of the rich.

156

You know nothing what may happen next moment ; yet you depend on next day. Does not death snatch away a man at a sudden swoop as a hawk snatches partridge ?

157

The holy Guru teaches that the way to God is one alike for the Hindu and the Muslim. Rama and Khuda are one, so says Kabir.

158

He who after playing the rogue to his brother, goes to prayer, is a Kaffir indeed. They who call others Kaffirs, do not see their own defects.

159

One should avoid staying in a place where there is a buffalo, a mare, a female ass, a cow or a lonely woman.

160

He who looks upon a woman as a brother does his sister and also keeps aloof from her, becomes no easy prey to death.

161

Death carries away a man from the innermost recess of a palace though mighty warriors may stand by, boasting of their valour.

162

Fool thou art that triest to unloose the knot of thy sins ; the black cannot turn white, wash it even with nine maunds of soap.

163

The virtuous are our soul and we their bodies ; they live in us, just as rain exists in clouds.

164

The virtuous are our soul and we their life; they exist in us just as ghee exists in milk.

165

The virtuous are our Atma and we their breath. They abide in us just as smell abides in flowers.

166

All know that a drop merges into a sea but few know that a sea merges into a drop.

167

The external eyes being gone and the internal being closed, one has lost all the four eyes and can hardly see anything. So says Kabir.

168

Do one thing well, all is done. Do all, all is lost. Water the root, flowers will come out blooming.

169

What availeth if thou hast passed thy life in muttering over beads if thy mind is not subdued; give up the crookedness of thy mind and the labyrinths of thy heart.

170

He that seeketh in deep water findeth. I, a fool in my search, kept only to the shore.

171

Dry as sand, bright as sunlight, is silence. Nothing is sweeter than it.

172

In a cage of nine-doors there dwelleth an airy bird. Its stay is a wonder; its flight none.

173

Cast out all pride of the heart and speak a word that may please others as well as thyself.

174

The righteous fear neither curses nor destruction. They find the Divine Truth and merge into it.

175

Know that happiness and misery are transient and that joy and sorrow are momentary. A sincere effort made for the good of others, never brings any pain.